



ALTADENA HERITAGE NEWSLETTER

Cooling Altadena

Keeping Altadena Cool

by Val Zavala

Climate change has gone from theoretical to real. Given the record-breaking temperatures, call it what it is: “global heating.” A UCLA study predicted that by 2050, “extreme heat events” of 95 degrees or hotter will occur in LA County three to four times more often than they do now. NOAA reports that so far in 2020, temperatures across the northern half of the planet are the hottest on record.

To complicate matters, Altadena suffers from what is called the “heat island effect.” Urban heat islands develop in areas of densely crowded buildings, blacktop, cars, air conditioners and lots of people, with few trees and little green space. The Los Angeles Basin, downtown especially, is a heat island. Winds from the ocean blow from south and west; the air is heated as it passes over the urban desert, and is stopped by the wall of the San Gabriel Mountains where it settles on Altadena. Result? Altadena is warmer than it should be due to the “heat island effect,” with the greatest increase of temperature at higher elevations. With global warming “locked in,” we must get smart and adapt.

Trees Can Help

Fortunately there are effective things we humans can do to help us live with rising temperatures in Altadena. Trees are living miracles, and planting lots more of them is our best bet for keeping Altadena cool. The shade they provide lowers the ambient temperature, keeping the ground and everything beneath their canopy cooler. That’s not all; trees keep surrounding air cool through transpiration as



Cobb Estate, proposed reforestation site. Painting by Mark Goldschmidt

they release water through their leaves, cooling the surrounding air as it evaporates; fortunately for us, transpiration works particularly well in our dry climate. Of course, trees provide many other benefits: they improve air quality, absorbing carbon dioxide and producing oxygen, and they provide habitat for birds and other wildlife. Their root systems absorb rain water and reduce runoff, they sequester carbon in their wood and roots, and they’re beautiful! Trees enhance our built environment, they tell us about nature and the seasons, they bring loveliness and joy. Lots of trees in a neighborhood increase property values and even strengthen social connections.

It has been proven that neighborhoods with large tree canopy coverage enjoy cooler temperatures. Coverage varies dramatically across Altadena and Los Angeles County. Parts of Altadena have a tree canopy coverage ranging from 42 to 89 percent; however, on the west side, mainly south of Ventura Avenue, it is much lower. The parking lot at Grocery Outlet is an example of a zero tree canopy, made worse by asphalt which retains and re-radiates heat into the air.

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Events



Tree Planting Workshop

Saturday, Nov 7th

10 AM to 12 PM

Get the link: altadenaheritage.org



Virtual Holiday Celebration

Sunday Dec 6th at 2 PM

The Great Altadena Baking Show
7 PM - Online Holiday Celebration

Letter from the Chair

Sharon Sand

This biannual newsletter really has marked time for me — the days are long but the year is short. It's a challenging time, but I've been inspired by how Altadenans continue to thrive, contribute, and support each other.

There is an important issue for Altadena on the ballot this year, Measure Z, to support our Library, the sole civic institution that is entirely Altadena's own. The small annex on Lincoln Avenue needs to be expanded, and our landmark main building is over 50 years old, and needs to be refurbished and made accessible to the disabled. Measure Z will provide funding to update these significant architectural, historic, and cultural resources and to provide services for all. Please vote yes on Measure Z and ask your neighbors to do the same.

At Altadena Heritage we have been thinking about our warming climate and our particular problem caused by LA's excess heat blowing up against our mountains. We asked ourselves, "What can we do about it?" and decided that there are a few things. We could encourage the planting of trees for one, as more trees will help cool our community. So, spearheaded by our Tree Committee, we're hosting interactive web-based workshops on trees and tree care featuring experts in their fields. We are also sponsoring a free tree giveaway — select, healthy trees to plant on your property. So many responded to our call that we are way over subscribed and have no more trees to give away at this time. The committee took great care in choosing the species to give out, and included some rather unusual ones as well as tried and true favorites. Be sure to catch our workshop on tree planting on November 7. Many thanks to SoCal Edison for the grants making this tree giveaway possible.

It came to our attention recently that big changes are planned for our Altadena nights. Edison, at the direction of the

Department of Public Works, has begun changing out our old streetlights for new LEDs. Sounds like a good idea considering the big energy savings, but Altadena Heritage is joining with other community organizations to say, "Hold on, let's see just exactly what you plan to do." We want community input, and we have reason to worry that we will lose the mellow nighttime light we are accustomed to. Brighter is not necessarily better, glare and contrast are far more dangerous for pedestrians and cars than our current minimum nighttime illumination. We are pleased that Supervisor Barger has acknowledged our concerns.

We're thrilled to have Rob Bruce rejoin the board! Some of you may know Rob from AH events at his home, and if you've been a member for some time, you may remember when he was chair of our board in the early 2000's. Rob worked as a city planner for 35 years, with an emphasis on improving the built environment, adaptive reuse of historic properties, affordable housing, complete streets and reinvigorating traditional downtowns. With all that experience, we are delighted that Rob will be serving as our Preservation Chair.

Board member Anne Chomyn created and has led the Tree Committee where she has been a real force pushing for AH to do all it can to help mitigate climate change, and to make Altadena a more beautiful place to live. Thank you, Anne! Huge thanks, too, are in order for Mark Goldschmidt, editor of this newsletter, and to the contributing writers who work with him. Mark puts his heart and soul into creating the best in-depth journalism in Altadena.

We are sad we cannot feast our members this Covid year, to rub shoulders and get to know you as we normally do. However, our Events Committee is creating a very special holiday meeting and celebration for 2020. We are calling on our creativity to connect us all while we hold the event virtually, so we'll see you there.



Happy 100th Birthday to the Christmas Tree Lane Association

A century has passed since Fred Nash first organized the lighting of the Santa Rosa deodars in 1920 and created Christmas Tree Lane. We owe a big thank-you to all the dedicated neighbors, past and present, who have volunteered year after year to do the hard work of maintaining this wonderful community tradition.

2020 Altadena
Heritage Board

Sharon Sand, Chair
Val Zavala, Treasurer
Anne Chomyn, Secretary

Alma Apodaca
Rob Bruce
Catherine Cadogan

Kathleen McDonnell
Newsletter edited by
Mark Goldschmidt

Altadena Nights: Big Changes Coming?

Our night-time ambiance is easily taken for granted. In Altadena, High Pressure Sodium (HPS) bulbs have illuminated most roadways for decades. Their softish light does not create blinding, jarring contrasts, even alongside areas with little or no other lighting. Altadena Heritage is working with coalition partners to keep it that way, advocating to County Board of Supervisor Barger's office and the Department of Public Works to be guided by scientific evidence before moving further ahead with countywide lighting redesign. While we welcome the street light conversion to LEDs to save energy, we recognize it as a big deal bringing major change. That is because in many cities and counties across America, the conversion has not gone well — there are lessons to be learned.

This is not a simple change of light bulbs. The list of unintended consequences is long: expensive “re-do’s” including addition of diffuser lenses, increased car and pedestrian accidents, human health problems (migraine and macular degeneration are among the most studied), and a disruption of circadian rhythms affecting all life, plant and animal. These are not hippy-dippy claims, but backed by serious, rapidly evolving scientific research.

So far the concrete takeaways from AH's back and forth with County officials and Edison are a letter from Supervisor Kathryn Barger promising to correct over-lighting at specific Altadena intersections, and this more recent, broad statement from Anish Saraiya, Chief Land Use Deputy in Supervisor Barger's office:

“I can assure you that the Public Works will not move forward with changes to street lights in Altadena without engaging and obtaining meaningful input from the community. We have asked them to take a pause on their plan to move forward with the conversion project and to reassess how they can work collaboratively with the community on this effort.”

Our advocacy was triggered when five intersections around Altadena, including one at New York and Allen, were converted to glaring, bluish light. At that intersection three light poles were replaced by nine and fitted with 4,000 Kelvin(K), LED luminaires. (Kelvin refers to the lights' color temperature.) Following correspondence from our coalition, Supervisor Barger directed the DPW to replace lamps in all five intersections with 3000K LEDs. The increased number of poles remains, however, which raises the questions: how much energy, if any, has been saved? Can we see better than before, or is glare, in fact obscuring vision?

Energy-efficient lighting with the look and feel similar to what pre-existed the conversion can be achieved, and is available today, using amber 2200K LEDs. We are advocating for that in Altadena. The 2200K lighting level was arrived at as ideal, both through scientific research and experience over the last 5-10 years. Cities doing LED conversions (and those studying conversions) have found that more light does not

translate into more safety and better visibility — in fact, it can have the opposite effect.

Besides Altadena Heritage, our coalition includes the Arroyo Seco Foundation, Altadena Town Council's Safe Streets Committee, Softlight Altadena, and Neighbors Building a Better Altadena. We are fortunate to have UCLA's Dr. Travis Longcore, renowned expert in street lighting and its impacts, speaking for us on technical matters in meetings with LA County officials and Southern California Edison. Edison has the contract to design, supply materials, and install the new system. Dr. Longcore has particularly drawn attention to the need for a master plan for this massive redesign.

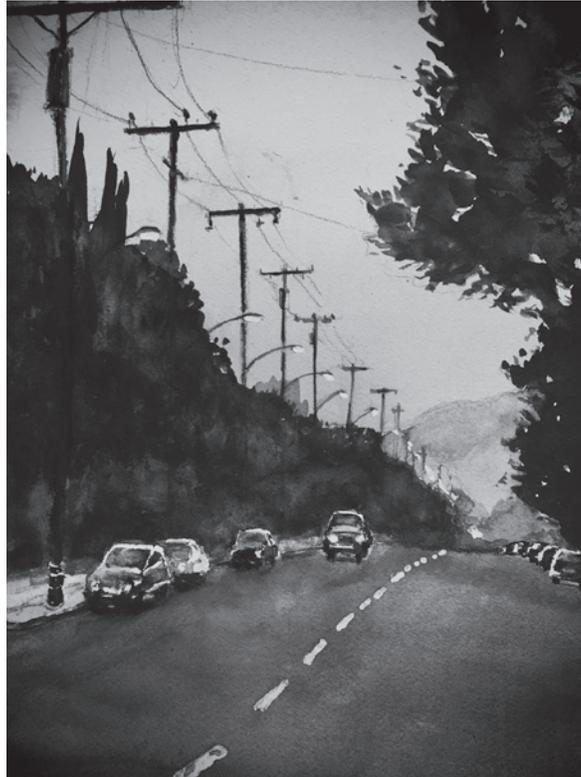
Why darkness is important

The biosphere has evolved in an ongoing rhythm of darkness and daylight called the circadian rhythm. Darkness signals mammals' bodies to secrete melatonin which

makes us go to sleep, but blue-rich light at night suppresses melatonin production and keeps us awake. Lighting the night to mimic daylight, which is what high-Kelvin LED lights do, disrupts circadian rhythms and is harmful to human, animal, and environmental health. It interferes with migrating birds' ability to navigate by the stars and moon; with many plant, tree, and fungi growing patterns; and even with insect reproduction.

Pedestrian fatalities

The contrast between darkness on lesser roadways and the glare of blue-rich high Kelvin lighting at intersections has a blinding effect on both drivers and pedestrians. This is likely one of the causes behind an 80% surge in pedestrian fatalities at intersections after LED streetlight conversions (completed in 2016) took place in Los Angeles, as reported by the LA Times. <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-vision-zero-20180227-story.html>.



E. Mendocino. Painting by Mark Goldschmidt

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Boyd Georgi: the Vision Behind the Altadena Library

by Betsy Kahn

When architect Boyd Georgi was designing the new Altadena Library on East Mariposa Street in 1966, he wanted to draw in a certain group of patrons, so he consulted a local expert. “Karl,” he said, “what would you do when you go in there? Where would you go?”

Georgi’s son Karl was a ninth grader at Eliot Junior High School, just a few blocks away from the construction site of the new library. Karl described to his dad the problem of kids and bike racks. The standard metal fence-like bike rack resulted in a lot of horseplay, knocked-over bikes, bent rims, and arguments. In town, Karl had seen a very elegant bike rack: a horizontal pole with a series of hooks, where you could hang your bike from the handlebars and the bikes remained stable. It was not a catalog item, so Georgi custom-designed one for the library, funded by the Women’s Club Junior Safety Committee. When kids in Altadena commented on the library’s bike rack, Karl would say, “That was my idea!”

Boyd Georgi wanted to make sure teenagers felt invited into the new library — that they knew someone had thought about them and wanted them to come in. Generations of Altadenans have since felt welcome every time they walk through the library doors: *invited*. Here we can see the beautiful bridged entrance from Mariposa Street, which in the original design spanned a series of pools and waterfalls cascading down the hill. Here is a comfortable seat in the sunken reading court, inviting you to relax and read. Here is a spot near the wall of windows, inviting you to rest and look at the view. These features of Georgi’s Altadena Library set it squarely in what is now called the Mid Century Modern style of architecture, born of post-war optimism, the desire to turn away from the past, to celebrate and exploit the potential of modern building materials and techniques, and to bring the beauty of nature indoors.

How it Came About

Gladys Babcock was appointed Altadena’s Head Librarian in 1951, when the Main Library was located on North Lake Avenue. By 1961, the Board of Trustees had accumulated sufficient funds

to purchase Colonel Green’s old estate on the corner of East Mariposa and Santa Rosa Avenue. In 1962, the Friends of the Library commissioned a study which revealed that Altadena needed a library four times the size of its Lake Avenue site, so in the fall of 1963 the Board of Trustees placed a successful \$500,000 bond measure on the ballot. By the spring of 1964 controversy had erupted, and the library’s future got tied up in a campaign to



*Altadena Library shortly after completion.
Photo by Julius Shulman, with permission.*

incorporate Altadena as a city (which was defeated), prompting a whole swath of Altadena to petition to secede from the Library District (that effort also failed). There were rumors of a secret plan to install a city hall in the new library building! The Trustee election in June even had a whiff of a library censorship dispute, with a last minute write-in candidate who lost to the Vice President of Altadena Savings and Loan.

Babcock lifted her head above these squabbles to work steadily toward the formation of the San Gabriel Valley Library System (later the Metropolitan Cooperative Library System), which qualified the District to apply for matching federal monies that increased the building fund to \$750,000.

In the summer of 1966, the building contract was awarded to R.C. Galyon, and construction began.

The Library Board of Trustees, led by long-time member Ann Fletcher, so trusted Babcock that they had turned the project over to her, and she and Georgi worked closely together on every detail of its design. Georgi told his son Karl many times that of all the architecture clients he had during his career, Gladys Babcock and the Altadena Library Board of Trustees were the best. They gave him free rein and adequate funding to realize a vision of an inspiring volume full of light, set organically in a garden.

Realizing the Vision

One breathtaking aspect of the design is the view of the outside space through floor-to-ceiling windows. Georgi’s design partner was the late Owen Peters, co-founder of Erikson, Peters & Thom (now known as EPTDESIGN), the landscape architecture firm hired to site the building and design its outdoor spaces. The challenge was to set the building in among mature existing trees,

while dealing with the difficult sloping topography. “Owen fell in love with that job,” says Bob Ericsson, Peters’ colleague at the firm. “Boyd Georgi was one of the nicest men I ever met, and Owen Peters was one of the most talented designers around. Neither one of them ever got the credit they deserved.”

The sixties was a decade of change and turmoil in the United States, which was reflected on the ground in Altadena. Redevelopment, freeway construction, and challenges to the segregation of Pasadena Unified School District roiled the community and caused its residents to consider what to keep and what to change about Altadena. Somehow, amid all this upheaval, Altadena came together to support the creation of this architectural jewel in the center of town, and it remains the only government institution that belongs entirely to Altadena.

It opened in August 1967. In its first two years the library became the venue for dozens of meetings of the Altadena Advisory Planning Committee (APAC), which advised LA County Regional Planning in creating a Preliminary General Plan for Altadena, published in March, 1969. Boyd Georgi served on the Land Use Subcommittee. In a report to APAC entitled “Architects in Action,” Georgi and his colleague Robert Gordon describe “what might become a cultural center anchored by the Altadena Library” on the west end of the Lake-Mariposa commercial center. Admitting to “a certain amount of dreaming,” they painted pictures of a downtown Altadena with fountains, soft music, street furniture, play centers, historical relics, and beautiful plantings, which have, alas, not come to pass. But the library itself has, in fact, served as the cultural center Georgi and Babcock dreamed of over 50 years ago.



Boyd Georgie



Gladys Babcock



Owen Peters

The Library Today

Half a century later, this modernist landmark library building retains its original beauty, but significant resources are required to fully restore it, and to repair and upgrade deteriorated and outdated systems. While Boyd Georgi’s bridge entrance on Mariposa Avenue was visionary in its time, providing wheelchair access decades before the Americans with Disabilities Act, the lower entrance from the parking lot needs a new elevator and ramping system to provide access to all levels of the building for wheelchairs and strollers, as well as anyone with difficulty

walking. If passed, Measure Z, a bond measure on this November’s ballot, will provide the funds for this major upgrade, as well as others slated for it and the Bob Lucas Memorial Branch Library. Measure Z will also fund the continuing innovative programs and services to ensure that every Altadenan feels invited in by their libraries, to know someone has thought about

them, and wants them to come.

Karl Georgi captures how many of us feel when we walk into the Altadena Library: “Tomes are written about how great architects deal with light and space, and how impacted we are, whether we know it or not, by the built environment. You can actually be physically and mentally uplifted, and you won’t know quite how it is happening. Of course, I am biased, but the best architects understand that, and they know a lot about people.” When we look at the legacy he left us in our library, we see that Boyd Georgi understood us well. We can be grateful for the enduring space he created to shelter and uplift the heartbeat of our community.

Altadena Nights - *Continued from page 3.*

Altadena’s sensitive habitat

Altadena is surrounded on three sides by the Hahamongna Watershed, the Angeles Crest National Forest, and Eaton Canyon. That’s why we are researching street lighting plans similar to Malibu’s, Maui’s, and Anza Borrego’s, where habitat, environmental concerns, and human health and safety were all taken into consideration in the design, and successful LED conversions implemented. Let’s learn from positive examples, instead of repeating avoidable mistakes.

Cost versus cost-effectiveness

LEDs with the highest Kelvin historically were the most efficient. LA County started by installing 5,000K lights but has replaced them here and there with 4,000K or 3,000K in response to “piecemeal” citizen complaints regarding glare, light “trespass” into homes, and health and safety issues. In the

meantime, evolving technology has made softer amber lights in the 2000 to 3000 K range much more energy efficient and competitive in cost.

Presenting a legible master plan that addresses such issues, measures how much and where energy will be saved, and allows public comment, is more prudent than tweaking the design depending only on local complaints and varied levels of awareness of the new lights across a population of more than 10 million. This is a multi-million dollar, multi-year project.

Altadena Heritage and partners are advocating for a master plan, so that sensitive habitat is not adversely affected, neighborhoods retain historical ambiance, pedestrians and drivers are not blinded by glare.

Contact AH Chair Sharon Sand at altadenaheritage@gmail.com if you would like to contribute to AH’s efforts on this issue affecting our health, safety, and culture.

Farewell & Thank You, Sussy!

By Michele Zack

Altadena lost a great friend — only to retirement, thank goodness! — when Sussy Nemer stepped down as Senior Deputy to Supervisor Kathryn Barger last month. It is fitting that Altadena Heritage pay tribute to Sussy, and her long, productive run as our favorite public servant in this, the Tree Issue of our newsletter. So many of the projects we've collaborated on involve keeping Altadena cool through addition of parks, trees, and open spaces.

Sussy began as an intern in 1998 in the office of the previous supervisor, Mike Antonovich, soon after college. Moving through the ranks until Antonovitch's then chief-of-staff Kathryn Barger promoted her to Senior Deputy in 2003, she's been our "go to" person ever since, helping us advocate for our town to our government (Los Angeles County). She always knew what vine we needed to shake to get results in the bureaucratic jungle of the largest county in the United States; sometimes she shook it for us. She always listened to us, and came through for Altadena, even though our unincorporated area is just one of four, along with seven cities, that she oversaw for her boss — who in turn answers to two million constituents! Anyone who has dealt much with LA County understands that the wheels of government grind slowly and often frustration is involved. Volunteers burn out and sometimes blow up or give up — but in Sussy we had a long-term steady partner for positive change.

We want to remember Sussy's impact here by listing projects that Altadena Heritage either led or had a major hand in. The list here is hardly definitive — she's worked with other groups as well — but we can vouch that Sussy immeasurably improved every one of these projects. In some cases, she was the instigator!

Altadena Heritage Areas (AHAs! 2001-13): Before LA County (est. 1850) finally adopted a policy to allow historic designation of buildings in 2016, AH encouraged neighborhood pride and preservation by naming 7 AHAs! around town such as Janes Village, Park Planned Homes on Highview, and the Equestrian Block. Sussy helped on several fronts, reminding Public Works that such things were so allowed (!) and then arranging for them to install signage created by AH. She oversaw County support of opening events (tables and chairs, and

occasionally an appearance by the Supervisor.)

Old Marengo Park (2005-present): This was a joint effort, with AH's role being to design the park and to negotiate with the County the number of trees allowed, a number that miraculously increased from one to fourteen with Sussy's help. We've led maintenance efforts of the park the past 15 years.

Hillside Ordinance addition to CSD (2005-8): This began with an AH roundtable, "The Future of our Foothills," to which interested parties including the Town Council, the County Department of Regional Planning, and the community were invited. Our program jump-started a committee that met for a few years with three AH reps on it; the result was an amendment to the Community Standards District (CSD) ordinance intended to prevent our foothills from looking like Glendale's. Included were new restrictions on grading and building atop ridgelines, and mandated non-reflective colors on structures visible from Altadena. The Fire Department approved!



Woodbury before Sussy.

Tree planting (2007-8): on Fair Oaks from Woodbury to Altadena Drive: The County originally proposed 14 crape myrtles, but today we have 70 Coast live oaks, which provide real shade, habitat, and continue the planting for which the street is named, up from Pasadena.



Woodbury after Sussy.

Woodbury Corridor (2005-11): With Sussy's critical identifying of funding, this important Altadena boundary/gateway has been dramatically improved. AH first proposed this project, worked with the Town Council, and then expanded it by successfully lobbying for parkway — in addition to median trees — to green Altadena west of Santa Rosa.

Farmers Market, 2011-12: AH became the founding nonprofit sponsor of the long longed-for market in order to enable commercial use in a public park. Lengthy and intense negotiations ensued with several County agencies and market operator Joseph Shuldiner — with Sussy overcoming roadblocks right and left. AH stepped back as sponsor, and nonprofit Altadena Community Garden took over this role in 2014.

Altadena's 125th Birthday Party, November 2012: AH led the charge, forming a committee and finding 60 sponsors, who threw the best community party ever, in the Davies Building in

Continued from previous page.

Farnsworth Park. Attendance: 800+, free food, music by Art Deco, dancing, an art show, and displays from groups and individuals. Sussy sat on the committee, and wrangled Parks and Rec, Public Works, and other County agencies to cooperate and contribute free rental of the space, tables, chairs, and much staff time.

Update of CSD (2013-17): AH had a rep on this committee which decreased parking requirements for small businesses, and with Sussy's nimble negotiations with Regional Planning and Public Works, managed to legalize fences and hedges above permitted 42-inch height — so most of us won't be out of compliance, after all!

“Welcome and Thanks for Visiting Altadena” Place-making Signs, 2015-17: After several early false starts, Sussy arranged for a committee with reps from Altadena Heritage, Town Council, and Chamber of Commerce to collaborate with Public Works to design monument and pole signs for key entry points into town. When the spot for one monument sign was determined to be too narrow for the 10-foot giant, Sussy backed our proposal to place it in the redesigned Triangle Park, then under construction — instead of losing it. The budget had already been approved, and it became the park's great “finishing touch!”

Altadena Triangle Park, 2014-17: Sussy first approached AH about the neglected not-quite-park space behind El Patron Restaurant at Lake and Altadena Drive, with the idea of remaking it more beautiful and accessible. AH went all in, providing park design, funds, fundraising, and historic knowledge for interpretive signs — partnering with LA County and Amigos de los Rios

to make it happen. The Town Council and many groups and individuals participated; today it is a vibrant, green civic center and gathering place.

Owen Brown Gravesite Project (2017-present): This ongoing collaborative project was dreamed about for 30 or more years, but has only recently achieved major progress: the securing of this significant historic site and open-space resource in Altadena's foothills, guaranteeing public access to it and prohibiting future development. Part of a “grand bargain/open-space land swap” involving permission to complete the La Viña housing development it overlooks, the site will be placed in a land conservancy and gain historic designation. An AH rep sits on the committee created by a Board of Supervisor's motion to oversee completion of above goals and fulfillment of other conditions made. Altadena Heritage and others had attempted to preserve this land for decades; Sussy's creativity finally opened a door to making it happen.



Right to left: Sussy Nemer, Michele Zack, Tim Cantwell, Marietta Kruells. They're happy because deal just signed to protect Owen Brown's grave site in perpetuity.

Contacted about her career in the County, Sussy says: “I served many communities, but Altadena was unique. I enjoyed working on projects with AH. While we didn't always agree, there was always mutual respect and commitment to Altadena.”

Thanks, Sussy, for everything! All is forgiven on our side for minor spat... You can't work together for 20 years without occasionally clashing. We will truly miss you, and look forward to developing a productive relationship with Savannah Moore, the new woman in your old shoes. Good luck to all of us.

Help! In Dire Need of Expertise

Way back in 1988, Altadena Heritage's visionary chairman Tim Gregory motivated us to create a lasting legacy, the Altadena Heritage Architectural Database (AHAD). AHAD is an illustrated and annotated inventory of 7,000 pre-WWII Altadena structures. The first database of its kind in California and a huge undertaking, AHAD is not only a tool for homeowners and researchers, but also a valuable resource that allowed AH to take stock of Altadena's significant architecture. It measured something that might otherwise have remained an abstraction, quantifying our architectural heritage in a way that helped us advocate for its protection. This was critical because beautiful, historic buildings were being torn down at the time and LA County had no historic ordinance or designation until 2016.

Recently, volunteer programmers have migrated AHAD from the original database to a user-friendly web version, available to all. Check it out at <http://ahad.altadenaheritagepdb.org>.

The 1988 survey covered only structures built prior to 1948, and the types and amount of data were limited. If we can find a volunteer or two with the requisite expertise, we will be able to overcome the last programming hurdles to expand the database many-fold. We will finally be able to add a rich trove of photos, drawings and information collected over the past 30 years, create entries for many of our outstanding contemporary and mid-century homes, and encourage our members to document their own properties.

Please contact Dick Rubin at drubin@drccassociates.com if you are technically inclined, want to move this exciting project forward, and are familiar with any of the following: Ruby on Rails database apps; MySQL; Heroku; browser database application architecture and design; general practices for archiving and retrieving historical data, including graphics and images; organizing volunteer help to maintain such a database.

A Brief History of Trees... in Altadena

By Michele Zack

A drone operator looks down on Altadena's treetops, surveying our varied and impressive urban forest canopy. Would he or she be surprised to learn that what first put this patch of land on the map was a total lack of trees?

Sixteenth-century Spanish sailors noticed, and at some point *began navigating by*, a springtime swath of brilliant gold beneath an inland mountain range. They called the seasonal phenomenon *Sabanillo de Oro*, Altar Cloth of Gold, noting it appeared on a treeless plateau south of an east-west mountain range between two canyons. Today, these features are known as the San Gabriels, Arroyo Seco, and Eaton Canyon.

Poppies! Every spring they proliferated across square miles of emptiness on a giant apron of decomposed granite shed over millennia by the mountains above. Except at small canyon outlets where oak woodlands terminated, the plateau was barren until winter rains swelled creeks and created countless rivulets to water it, causing the brief, riotous bloom visible from sea.

Apart from coastal cruises in 1542 and 1602, Spaniards took little interest in the land they claimed. Natives were left alone until Gaspar de Portola's 1769 overland expedition began dramatic change for California's people and environment. Ninety-eight percent of all plants here, including trees, are non-native. They were introduced, most quite recently.

From desert to orange groves

Spaniards quickly developed water resources along the Raymond fault when they established the Mission San Gabriel six miles south in 1771; acres of vineyards, citrus, and olive groves soon appeared. Altadena's plateau, however, remained a semi-desert except in springtime for the next 100 years. Other than a few natives, trees didn't grow here until after the Civil War.

Around 1866, Connecticut Yankee Ben Eaton drew water up from the canyon on whose edge he'd built the San Gabriel Valley's first wood-framed house. Irrigation made agriculture viable; he, like most westering settlers, was most interested in planting what would pay. His first crops were wine grapes, and more controversially, orange trees. This was before the great citrus boom; oranges planted by Spaniards were not terribly good — dry, pithy, and sour compared to the juicy miracle of the navel orange about to appear. The accepted

wisdom was that citrus would not thrive far above sea level — and the lowest elevation of Eaton's land was 1200 feet.

What a difference a decade makes. Eaton's crops succeeded beyond expectation, and in 1873 he brokered a 4,000-acre sale to Indiana Colony investors. He developed Arroyo Seco water for the community and led its organizing body, the San Gabriel Valley Orange Grove Association (SGOGA), its first years when Pasadena named itself. Navel oranges and other citrus rapidly overtook grapes in Southern California's main industry — agriculture. By the 1880s people were pouring in, health-seekers and others drawn west by the sunshine, and fleeing polluted urban centers and tuberculosis, which had become the leading cause of death there.

With irrigation, Altadena's first tree immigrants arrived. Oranges offered a less back-breaking alternative to traditional farming — as well as the possibility of transforming the transient springtime gold into a verdant, highland paradise. Land promoters dangled the notion that a mere five or 10-acre holding could provide a family with a good living.

Named for a Nursery

The 1,400 highland acres making up most of today's Altadena had been considered worthless, a "deal sweetener" tossed in to close the sale by bringing down the average per-acre price to just \$6.60. It was miles from the strip of land to the south along the Arroyo Seco where the Indiana Colony first settled.

With no intention of developing the highland waste, SGOGA held onto it for 8 years as values rose; in 1881 Woodbury brothers Fred and John bought 900 acres for \$5 an acre. Pasadena real estate was just heating up; street trees began defining the civic-minded community's roadways and shading its homes. The Woodburys launched the California Olive Company on 200 of their new acres, adding thousands of trees to the highlands. One

of the company's partners was Byron O. Clark.

Clark was a horticulturalist/businessman. He operated at least three area nurseries, cultivating and selling ordinary and rare trees, along with ornamental plantings, to Pasadena's avid population of gardeners and city-makers. When Clark moved from his second nursery location on Lincoln south of Woodbury Road to a property in Linda Vista, John Woodbury asked



New arrivals from the east coast invariably planted palm trees. Courtesy of Altadena Historical Society



Banbury house, circa 1880, not a tree to be seen. Courtesy of Altadena Historical Society

if he could appropriate the old nursery's name for his new subdivision. Clark agreed.

Thus Altadena emerged in late 1887. The name implies an "upper" or "higher" Pasadena, and resonates with our state's Mexican name, Alta California. Before the Woodburys began publishing wishful, fanciful maps and brochures promoting Altadena, this name appeared only on Clark's nursery stationery.

Boom ended, bust ensued

Unluckily for the Woodburys, the real-estate boom that had become red hot by the late 1880s turned to bust just as Altadena was launched. The grand hotel, railway work yards, and thousands of house lots laid out confidently in subdivision maps never materialized. They did plant an impressive allée of deodars that eventually grew into Christmas Tree Lane. However, until well after the turn of the 20th century, Altadena remained a collection of rural properties crowned by a string of mansions along Mariposa Street. Unusually, the area was served by three urban railroads accessing the new Mount Lowe Railway (opened 1893), popular mountain trailheads, and several sanitarium for tuberculosis sufferers. People continued to trickle in, most purchasing cheaper 1-20 acre holdings, a far cry from tiny town-sized house lots that would have made the Woodburys rich.

The newcomers did plant trees, however, mostly citrus, as well as wine grapes, (frowned on in temperance-minded Pasadena). With irrigation, Altadena's environment and cheap land made it perfect for commercial nurseries, which proliferated, supplying growing nearby communities. Easterners and mid-westerners loved the sunshine and light, and began to recreate gardens like those back home — but with more varieties of trees and plants and a longer season to enjoy the outdoors. Before electricity, houses needed trees for cooling.

The 120-acre mesa of Henninger Flats above the canyon, which by then was called Eaton, became a farm/nursery. Reforestation experiments carried out there by T.P. Lukens and Reinhart Busch were among the first to connect the condition of the watershed with water supply, which was becoming a problem as wells proliferated and small water companies sprang up to serve residential customers. LA County established a forestry division in 1911 and a nursery on the site of the current Farnsworth Park — from whence it had been patrolling the "San Gabriel Timberland Reserve" since 1897.

Tree use shifts in 20th century

The first decade of the 20th century was busy, tree-wise, and set us on a course of residential and street tree, not only agricultural, planting. Altadenan W. Scott Way, horticulturist and founder of the Audubon Society in California, wrote about Altadena's special soil, "where apple and orange trees could be

cultivated side by side." More nurseries emerged: Clyde Colby Company, Pettycords, Pitzer's, and Trigg. An olive oil company was founded here in 1906 by A.D. West, and well-known plant expert F.S. Allen wrote: "In Altadena, roses, lilies, heliotropes never take a holiday. Every home is surrounded by a wilderness of luxuriant growth."

Two exotic species, eucalyptus and palms, were popular in these years and planted by the thousands for windbreaks, as street trees, and in gardens. They remain a mixed legacy. Arborists today recommend not planting eucalyptus in Altadena (especially close to the mountains) because in fires, their high oil content causes them to explode, sending flaming shards up to a mile — and also discourage the iconic swaying palm, which provides no shade and sometimes, requires lots of water.

Ornamental and fruit tree varieties received boost in 1910 when Frederick Popenoe established the West India Gardens on 13 acres between Marengo and North Raymond Avenues above Mountainview cemetery. His family of plant breeders and

explorers included sons Paul and Wilson, who visited Arabia, Iraq, Persia, and North Africa, returning with 16,000 date palms for their desert property in Thermal. Popenoe also sent representatives south, bringing back subtropical fruits to see which might thrive further north. Of many varieties of the then virtually unknown avocado, only one survived its first cold winter on Altadena's plateau. Popenoe named it Fuerte. He promoted and lectured on the "new" fruit, it gradually gained a following, and ended up the industry standard for 50 years. The Hass avocado, a later rival variety, was first hybridized by a Pasadena postman of that

name who dabbled in plant breeding. He crossed a Fuerte with a heretofore unproductive variety in 1925, and came up with an easy-to-peel version that eventually overtook the original. Interestingly, Hass the human is buried in Mountain View Cemetery, steps from the West India Gardens site where the Fuerte survived its first hard winter in Altadena, and from whence it began conquering the public palate.

The Popenoes introduced numerous varieties of fruit trees to commercial growers and to our backyards: loquats, pineapple guavas, various nuts, and zapotes, as well as ornamentals. Other nurserymen followed, until Altadena's land became too expensive for this use. Nuccio's, Altadena's last commercial nursery, was established in 1935.

Our plateau between Arroyo Seco and Eaton Canyon is no longer empty and arid, but fertile, supporting an impressive tree canopy nurtured over 150 years. It helps protect us from the heat while beautifying our town. Continuing to maintain and grow this canopy in the 21st Century is the most effective means we have to make our community more livable, and to address the existential challenge of global warming.

Plant a tree in 2020! Be sure to select varieties that are waterwise and can take the heat while continuing to cool us.



Altadena in the agricultural era.

Cooling Altadena *Continued from page 1*

Tree Planting Programs

This year, Altadena Heritage has concentrated on promoting tree planting by putting on educational programs about trees – how to select, site, plant, prune, and care for them. The first on-line interactive seminar, “Right Tree, Right Place,” broadcast September 26, featured Dr. Jerrold Turney with the LA County Arboretum. Turney’s botanical knowledge is vast and his expertise invaluable for tree planters. He begins, “Before selecting a tree, think carefully. It defines your landscape. It will be there for decades.” Turney has plenty of other advice, including, sadly, warning not to plant some of our most beloved tree species, including olive, sycamore, crape myrtle, and plum, because they are susceptible to recently arrived invasive pests and diseases.

Making sure the location you choose is large enough for the size of the mature tree is key, Turney says, “I’ve seen so many large trees planted only five feet from a home and they end up getting cut down. Also, don’t plant under power lines if it’s going to be a tall tree. Don’t plant on top of utilities or drain pipes.” He also advises buying a young tree rather than a larger, more mature and more expensive one. A young tree will adjust better to its environment and will be more likely to thrive. Planting trees is a great thing to do for the environment, just be sure you do your homework so your investment of time and money pays off.

Dr. Turney returned for another interactive web workshop, “Pruning and Tree Care,” and he will do a “Tree Planting Demonstration” in real time on Saturday, November 7, 10-12. It will be interactive, so watch it in real time to participate if you can (please register beforehand so we can send you a link). All webinars will be posted at altadenaheritage.org if you miss the live broadcast.

Free Trees

This year, Altadena Heritage received a grant from Southern California Edison so we could invite residents to apply for a free tree, with priority given to those who live in parts of Altadena with the fewest trees – mainly on the west side. Species were selected for their compatibility with Altadena’s climate, with some unusual types included to diversify our suburban forest. Over 40 trees were given away.

Altadena Heritage offered trees to plant anywhere you like on your property. But if it’s street trees you’re after, the County has been offering free trees for parkways for more than 30 years. (The parkway is the median between sidewalk and curb, or, where streets have neither, in the County right-of-way, generally the first 10 feet in from the street.) Upon request, the County will come out and survey the area to be sure there are no infrastructure or other obstacles.

Norik Sahak, Urban Forester with the LA County Department of Public Works, says “We evaluate the location of the request, then the department arborist narrows down the choice of trees. We try to give a couple choices based on other trees on the street, the climate zone, and conditions.” If there is a dominant tree species already on your street, they will likely conform to that. Trees are usually planted in the rainy season when they will be less stressed. The County will plant the trees. In return for this service, they ask residents to water them regularly the first few years until they are well established. Still, not all trees will survive, so Public Works will plant a tree a second time if necessary. Residents are welcome

to plant their own, although this requires a permit from the Department. Permits are free.

Sahak says Altadenans request trees more than many neighborhoods. “We planted about 150 trees in Altadena over last two years.” You would think that trees along parkways would be a popular program, but Sahak says many residents don’t like trees, either because of perceived problems with roots or because they can be messy. “Sometimes,” says Sahak, “we have gone through the trouble to plant trees in parkways only to come back

and find that residents have pulled them out and thrown them away.”

Amigos de los Rios, a non-profit landscape architectural organization based in Altadena, also works to increase the tree canopy, protect and restore open space and build parks, especially in under-served neighborhoods. Eva Malis of Amigos de los Rios says, “We spent a lot of time surveying the streets of Altadena and building a database that includes existing trees and potential tree-planting sites in front yards as well as parkways.” They have funding to plant 40 trees along Altadena parkways, and are obtaining permits to plant more along Altadena Drive, Woodbury, Lincoln, and Figueroa this fall and winter.

Trees and Fire

We all benefit from having trees surround our houses to provide shade, comfort, oxygen, and prevent sun damage to our wood trim and siding. However, not all trees are created equal in usefulness and some are downright dangerous. Altadena, especially above Loma Alta, is on the urban interface with chaparral-covered hillsides. It’s a beautiful place to live, but from time to time fire roars down into our neighborhoods.

Back in Altadena’s early days, eucalyptus were found to be useful because they grew fast, required no irrigation, formed windbreaks and provided shade. In recent years however, fires are burning hotter and more frequently, and eucalyptus trees are extremely dangerous. When on fire they may explode, expelling embers that can travel over a mile to spread fire far from the initial conflagration. Pines too can spread fires through cones and flying



Designed for climatic comfort: the 1905 PJ McNally house, current home of Jim Vitale & Dale Lacasella.

Continued from previous page.

embers from thin fragile branches, and resinous cypress and junipers are highly flammable. Away from the urban interface, eucalyptus and pine trees are not a danger, except for the occasional limb drop. However, close to the native chaparral it's time to replace the eucalyptus, an iconic component of the California rural landscape, with other types of trees. Best to check with the County Fire Department, they have lists of trees to avoid in areas prone to fire.

Cool Roofs, Cooler Homes

When roofs reflect the sun's radiation back into space, homes stay cooler. Dark-colored roofing materials absorb heat and re-radiate it into the surrounding air and into our living spaces. A white roof has the highest reflectance (called albedo), but manufacturers now make reflective "cool" roofing materials by embedding reflective particles in them. Traditional asphalt shingles or built-up roofing only reflect 5 to 15 per cent of solar radiation; cool roofs generally reflect 65 to 70 percent of incoming rays. On a hot day the surface of a cool roof can be up to 50 degrees cooler than a traditional roof, requiring less air-conditioning use and lower electric bills. A cool roof also keeps the outside ambient temperatures lower. Each home is unique, but in general cool roofs save an average of 7 to 15 percent on cooling costs. Interestingly, traditional terra cotta tiles are rated as the coolest roofs.

Fortunately, a cool roof costs no more than a conventional shingle roof, a good thing since it is now required by LA County ordinance. Cool-roof shingles come in a range of colors – greys, browns, beiges and taupe. Lighter colors are slightly more effective.

Altadena resident Jim Vitale, AIA, is a LEED-certified architect who works for the State Architectural Office. He sees big energy savings if cool roofs are combined with good venting in the attic. "Also insulation is important. Shade from your trees makes a difference, as well as the slope and direction of your roof and what direction it faces." But in general he says, "You should see a reduction of approximately 20 to 30 percent in interior temperature with a properly insulated attic and a cool roof."

Design to Keep Cool

"Design makes a big difference in how hot the interior gets," Vitale says. "Take our home for example. It was built in 1905. It

faces south. It has an open floor plan so when we open the doors prevailing winds blow the hot air right out of the house. Also the front yard is shaded with big trees that act like natural umbrellas. During the winter the leaves drop and the sun warms the house. So we've been able to get by without significant air conditioning and heating." Ceiling height also makes a difference, "A 9-foot ceiling creates a stratifying effect," Vitale explains. "Heat rises and collects well above the height of the average person. The cooler air stays near the floor and the breeze going through keeps the home cool."

It's important to remember that air conditioning pumps heat from inside to outside. Millions of air conditioning units in homes, businesses, offices, and cars are transferring heat from these enclosed spaces out into the environment. Back in 1905 there were no cooling machines to rely on other than, perhaps, an electric fan, so builders mitigated the heat with good room ventilation in the house and attic. We should learn from our ancestors -- the less we rely on air conditioning, the more energy we save and the less waste heat we contribute to our environment. An air conditioner is a great amenity, but we all benefit if we learn to live with less.

Cool Streets

We would love to see Lake Avenue bordered by tall majestic trees, with more trees and greenery in a center median. They would shade the asphalt, cool the air, and frame our mountain view. Those trees won't appear soon, but don't be surprised if the road is painted white someday soon. The City of Los Angeles has tried coating streets with a special white slurry in certain hot spots in the San Fernando Valley. Applying a reflective coating lowered street surface temperature 10 to 15 degrees, which reduced air temperatures nearby. We hope that our great neighbor, the City of Los Angeles, keeps finding new ways to combat the heat island that it has created. In the meantime, trees are our best answer for cooling Altadena.

A Trillion Trees

Climatologists say that one of the most effective strategies to fight climate change would be to plant a trillion trees worldwide. A report in the journal *Science* says, "tree restoration is one of the most effective carbon drawdown solutions to date." Let's all do our small part to help soften the impact of a warming world.

Links for Cooling Altadena

For a wealth of information on tree selection and planting, including recorded videos of AH tree webinars, go to the Altadena Heritage website:
altadenaheritage.org/altadena-heritage-tree-page

For parkway trees, go to LA County Department of Public Works go to: pw.lacounty.gov/rmd/parkwaytrees

To apply for a free parkway tree from the LA County Public Works, go to: tinyurl.com/y4lpvhqc

To learn more about Amigos de los Rios, go to: amigosdelosrios.org

To see a map of Altadena's tree canopy, go to: www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fse-prd645759.html

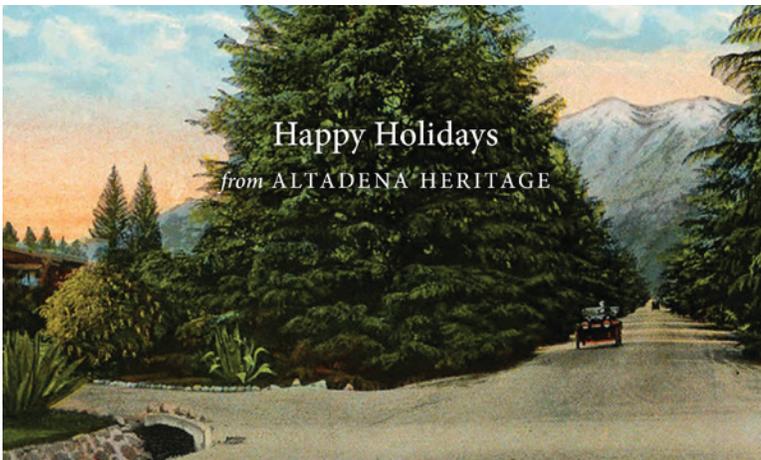
To watch a short video on tree canopy disparities go to: tinyurl.com/y5stu6qc



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Online Holiday Celebration

Altadena Heritage is celebrating the holidays in a new way this year. We will not be hosting our traditional holiday party, due to Covid, but we will certainly be celebrating!

December 6th 2020

2:00pm: The Great Altadena Baking Show 2020
Join Altadena chef, Onil Chibas,
for a cooking demonstration of holiday treats

7:00pm: Online Holiday Celebration
Review of the year
Writers, poets, artists!
Quiz results

Check altadenaheritage.org for details.



BECOME A MEMBER

Choose one:

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Type of membership:

- \$25: Individual \$35: Household \$30: Senior Household
 \$15: Senior individual (65 and over) \$100: Patron/Business

Are you interested in volunteering?

- Yes! Contact me. Not at this time.

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Join online at www.altadenaheritage.org